Atkins and After

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With nearly 2 million Britons undernourished, and whose problems cost the NHS £226 million per year, we may well wonder why all the fuss about the Atkins weight-loss diet. Going into hospital does not improve the situation either, as more than half of hospital patients eat so poorly that they leave hospital clinically malnourished!

However, it has been known for several years that high-protein diets overload and damage the kidneys. In a survey of 1,624 US women (aged between 42 and 68, and covering 11 years) 489 had some degree of kidney problem. Women with normal kidney function were found to have a reasonably well-balanced diet, whilst those using the high-protein diet showed deterioration in kidney function.

Where kidney problems were already present the high-protein diet compounded the problem. Leading researcher Eric Knight (at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts), said, ‘The potential effects of dietary protein consumption on renal function on persons with mild renal insufficiency have important public health implications given the prevalence of high-protein diets’. There was also a tendency for people using these diets to feel tired and lethargic.

Another study at Harvard involving 47,000 male health professionals shows an increased risk of developing gout in people using high-protein diets. Gout is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis in men. It usually affects the big toe (but can affect other joints as well), and can lead to permanent damage. Gout occurs when purine from the diet is broken down and uric acid is deposited in the tissues.

It is said that actions speak louder than words. The Atkins marketing people say there was no connection between the Atkins diet and the vascular disease and 18-stone frame of the founder of the program! What should we conclude about Atkins’ colleague, Dr. Fred Pescatore, who is now marketing—at £25 per bottle—a macadamia nut-oil mixture, claimed to be as or more effective than the Atkins diet?!

The overweight are desperate to lose, and help is on the way. An Austrian company is marketing caffeine-laced tights —yes, you did read correctly! The idea behind their production is that body heat will be released, and the body will absorb the caffeine, which will then break down the ‘cellulite’. There is no evidence that caffeine has this effect, but if the tights are used often enough people might be too high to care about their weight!

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